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Sent: 6/22/2010 9:21:50 AM

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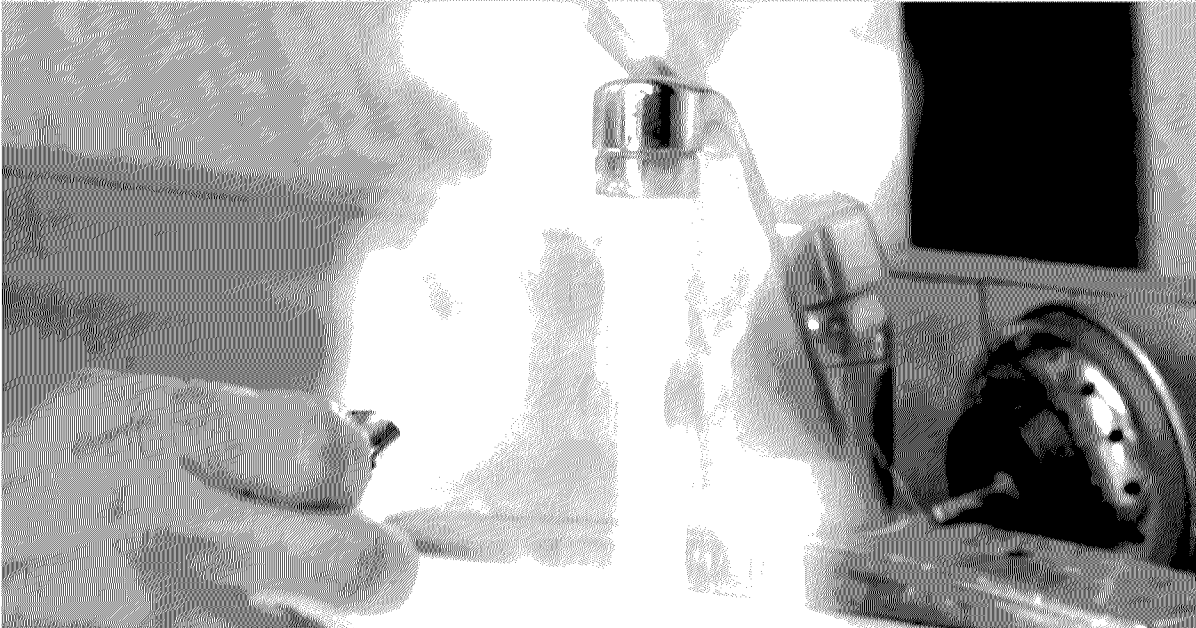
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Subject: NY Times - television review of Gasland (includes reference to Al)

This ran prior to last night's HBO premiere.

Television Review | 'Gasland'

The Costs of Natural Gas, Including Flaming Water



An image from Gasland, a documentary on problems attributed to natural-gas drilling, including flaming kitchen taps.

By MIKE HALE
New York Times
Published: June 20, 2010

Gasland, a documentary making its television premiere on HBO on Monday night after winning a special jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival, is maddening in several distinct ways.

The first is the way its director, Josh Fox, intended. If you are predisposed to distrust big business and the bureaucrats who regulate it, then Gasland, a soberly muckracking film about the health and environmental dangers of the current nationwide rush to drill for natural gas, will light a flame in you. It might resemble the flames Mr. Fox films sprouting from people s kitchen faucets or from the surfaces of polluted creeks, in places where methane has turned water into a fire hazard.

Mr. Fox lives in northeastern Pennsylvania above the vast Marcellus Shale formation, which has been much in the news the last few years as energy companies have rushed to sink wells employing the controversial technique of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, in which millions of gallons of water and chemicals are pumped underground to extract natural gas trapped in the shale. The film came about, he says on screen, when he received an offer from a company to lease his 19.5 acres with an upfront payment of nearly \$100,000. Rather than take the money, he begins investigating stories he has heard of ruined water wells and sickened families in nearby Dimock Township.

From there he heads west, visiting landowners and drill sites in states like Colorado and Wyoming, where fracking has been practiced for years. Wherever he goes he finds flammable, foul-smelling water, sick people and animals, and families who no longer use their wells but truck in all their household water (usually bought at Wal-Mart). In some cases oil companies provide the water after settling lawsuits.

The accumulation of stories and sympathetic faces is persuasive; it s buttressed by testimony from scientists like Theo Colborn and Al Armendariz, named regional director of the Environmental Protection Agency in Dallas since the film was completed. Most viewers who seek out Gasland are likely to share Mr. Fox s outrage (which he expresses in melancholy tones) and to accept the picture, familiar and so often true, of heedless profiteering, co-opted and ineffective regulation, Orwellian spin control and innocent, ruined lives. Comparisons to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico will be unavoidable.

That s not how everyone will respond of course. The oil and gas industry has already been busy condemning the film and disputing Mr. Fox s assertions. And, again, it s maddening to see how easy he makes it for the film s critics to attack him, and how difficult for sympathetic but objective viewers to wholly embrace him.

Like a less manic Michael Moore, Mr. Fox capitalizes on people s refusals to be interviewed, presenting several montages in which he is seen supposedly making repeated, fruitless phone calls to corporate offices. He cleverly inserts in his closing credits a long list of interviews we were declined, which includes many chief executives of energy companies as well as Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. It s an important element, at least in emotional terms, in Mr. Fox s case, but what we don t see with any real specificity is how these people were approached or what they were told about the film, leaving it difficult to make judgments about their refusals to appear on camera.

Mr. Fox shows a general preference for vivid images bright red Halliburton trucks, beeping but unidentified scientific instruments over the more mundane crossing the t s and dotting the i s of investigative journalism.

In one particularly unfortunate decision, he includes audiotapes of an anonymous caller even he doesn t appear to know who she is accusing Halliburton of dumping chemicals in a Pennsylvania creek. He presents a despairing picture of conditions in the Susquehanna Valley without noting that there have been state investigations of unsafe practices there. As the film progresses, the lines between fracking and oil and gas production in general become blurred.

Mr. Fox closes with an ominous warning about the threat fracking poses to New York City s watershed. New Yorkers who are frightened at the prospect will want to know that the state recently tightened regulations governing drilling in that area, at least temporarily.

GASLAND

HBO, Monday night at 9, Eastern and Pacific times; 8, Central time.

Written and directed by Josh Fox; Trish Adlesic, Mr. Fox and Molly Gandour, producers; Matthew Sanchez, editor. Produced by International WOW Company.

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